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ABSTRACT

This document presents, for local Urban League affiliates and community-based organizations, a framework for developing and conducting locally operated mentor programs. The development of mentoring programs has been an incremental process. Mentoring programs now contain some elements that other programs lack, such as an emphasis on self-esteem, self-valuing, goal setting, and parent participation. As community-based organizations have adopted mentoring programs, they have recognized that the leadership, recruitment, and training of volunteers are key elements. Mentoring-program managers have found that their relationships must involve certain facilitating, advising, helping, and instructing activities. Candidates have differing expectations about their roles, and training must ensure that mentors are realistic about their expectations and that they are prepared to fulfill the roles expected of them by the program. Mentor selection has been a difficult issue for some programs, but good recruitment criteria and careful program monitoring can prevent many problems. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

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Mentoring

An Overview

Young Black Males

ID 030218

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PREFACE

*H*ave you ever asked yourself why over the centuries many fathers sought mentors for their children, particularly for their sons? Or why many young men over the years have looked for older successful men, sometimes women, to guide them along their career paths? Most of us can point to someone who helped us to succeed. The National Urban League is helping affiliates and other organizations to find a number of "someones" to help young African American youth to escape the perils which exist within their communities and develop into healthy successful adults.

*T*he purpose of this document is to share with local Urban League affiliates and community-based organizations, a framework for developing and conducting locally operated mentor programs. This document may be used as a reference resource. In addition, the program's attractive posters may be used to enhance the organization's mentor recruitment efforts.

INTRODUCTION

*T*hroughout the history of the world, mentoring has been instrumental in the rise and success of many individuals. In Homeric literature, Odysseus gave the name Mentor to his friend whom he asked to guide and educate his son, Telemachus. In Biblical history, King Saul was the mentor of David. Recent history informs us that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was mentor to former Atlanta, Georgia Mayor, Andrew Young and Reverend Jesse Jackson. Also, Dr. King was mentored by the late, great Dr. Benjamin Mays, former president of Morehouse College.

*T*he mentoring relationship has been responsible for nurturing the personal growth, educational and career development of countless mentees or proteges over the centuries. In the last decade, educators, community workers, social workers and other human service professionals have revisited this concept as an intervention strategy for helping young people at risk of failing to reach their potential.

*I*n recent years, mentors have helped thousands of young people to achieve self-reliance, increased self-esteem, and improved personal and academic growth. For youth today, about whom we are most concerned, this kind of relationship can help prevent young people from multiple perils of dropping out of school, early parenthood, poverty and drugs.

*T*he development of mentor programs has been an incremental process. For decades, educational and cultural programs were thought of as the means to motivate and ignite academic achievement in children who were considered in need because they came from disadvantaged circumstances. These efforts were later augmented with academic support activities, mainly tutoring, which was later followed by more structured academic classes particularly in reading and mathematics. In the early eighties, "big brother" and "big sister" type programs proliferated and still insufficient numbers of marginal mentees were succeeding in these special programs.

*M*entoring emerged with some new elements the other programs did not contain. These elements focussed on self-esteem, self-valuing, goal setting and encouraging parental participation. These are aspects of mentoring which differed from other program efforts. The re-emergence of mentoring was almost an act of desperation rather than a planned program strategy.

In the late seventies and early eighties when adolescent pregnancy and drop-out rates soared to crisis proportions, social workers, youth workers, teachers and children's advocates were pressed for solutions. The existing program strategies were having some impact, but significant progress was not being manifested. Program planners were aware that programs which utilized adults working on an individual basis with children, whether as tutors, "big sisters" or "big brothers" were showcasing youth participants who enthusiastically spoke of improved school work, a better understanding of themselves, enjoying new kinds of experiences and proclaiming respect and admiration for their helper.

Community Organizations

Community organizations were quick to pick up on this so called new approach. With their close ties to the community, they were able to develop corps of volunteers to work with teens on a one-on-one relationship, to encourage improved academic performance, expose them to never before experienced cultural activities and career options.

Community-based organizations established a programmatic format for mentor programs. **Leadership** was a primary concern. Someone was needed to coordinate and monitor all the components and activities of the program. **Recruitment and Training** of mentors was a key element. Developing procedures to effectively recruit mentors who were mature and willing to commit themselves to children and their futures was a keystone program element. Training was crucial in assisting mentors on how to build strong relationships with their mentees. In addition to imparting information related to what and how, the training was designed to sensitize mentors to verbal and non-verbal messages which would foster positive development of the mentor/mentee relationship.

Community-based organizations made it perfectly clear to all participants that the mentor was in no way a replacement or surrogate for the parents of the mentee. Parents and mentors were encouraged to work together. All participants, mentors, mentees and parents were brought together before the mentoring started, usually through orientation sessions. Meetings of this type were held intermittently throughout the mentoring period.

Definition of Mentoring

*F*or the purposes of NUL affiliates and community-based organizations, we will be discussing the mentoring of children at the elementary and secondary school level. *Mentoring occurs when a mature adult advises and provides guidance and advocacy for pre-adolescents and adolescents. In this ongoing one-on-one relationship, the mentor helps the mentee to address his concerns, needs, education and career aspirations* over an extended period of time.

*G*rowth and development during the adolescent years is emotionally trying and sometimes painful for the so-called "average" child. All too often, this is overlooked by adults. The "at risk" child of color, however, suffers multiple disruptive and turbulent episodes given his social, economic, environmental and discriminatory experiences. These factors make it essential that mentors be sensitive to these salient aspects of the life circumstances of "at risk" youth of color in order to enhance their interaction with the child.

Defining the Mentor Role

*T*he mentor's role is to assist the mentee through personal advisement, goal-setting, academic support services and cultural experiences to achieve an optimal level of academic performance, self-awareness, positive social behavior and family community responsibility.

*K*nowing what you want the mentor to do will be crucial to his effectiveness with the mentee and a contributing factor to the success of the overall program. The mentor's specific responsibilities should be determined by the needs of the individual to be mentored and the time constraints of the prospective mentor. Most mentoring programs will utilize volunteers whose time will be limited. For example, some mentors will have the time to access teachers and other school staff members to advocate for his mentee. Some will only be able to work weekends. With these considerations in mind, a formal assessment procedure should be developed and implemented to determine the needs (i.e., counseling, advocacy, tutoring, etc.) of the mentee and the skills availability of the mentor. Once this process is complete, the matching of mentor and mentee should be initiated.

Important Mentor Activities

*M*ost mentoring program managers have found that the mentoring relationship must involve certain basic activities. These are:

- *F*acilitating the mentee's ability in accessing needed services such as employment resources, healthcare services, academic support personnel and programs.

- *F*acilitate mentee's meeting others who can help.

- *P*roviding exposure to places and activities which are positive and employment resources which the mentee may not have experienced.

- *A*dvising him about things that trouble him, such as peer pressure, female relationships and self-identification.

- *H*elping him prepare for interviews (i.e., job, school) and transitions to other new experiences (i.e., going from junior high school to high school).

- *H*elping the mentee to develop analytical and reasoning skills which will foster values clarification and personal goals development.

- *I*nstruct the mentee on how to set and achieve goals.

*F*ull engagement in these activities is considered central to the needs and future life chances of the mentee. The mentor may engage in other supportive activities (i.e., parent contact, advocacy, etc.) with the approval of the program manager.

Mentor Training

Candidates for mentoring have varying levels of knowledge and experience about mentoring, therefore, program administrators should not assume that candidates are prepared to mentor without training. The training should not be a time consuming activity, but program managers must assure themselves, mentees and parents/guardians that the candidates are able to fulfill their responsibilities. Training time can be shortened with the use of well written materials and visual aids that allow candidates to study on their own time. Ongoing training and information sessions for mentors, mentees and parents are a necessary program components of the program. Following, are subjects which may be included in mentor training:

- Program Expectations
- Mentee Life Options
- Age Appropriate Activities
- World of Work
- What is Responsibility
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Substance Abuse Prevention
- AIDS Prevention
- Accessing Community Resource
- Behavior Patterns of Successful Teens
- Decision-Making
- Goal/Setting
- Who Am I?
- Communication Skills
- Human Sexuality and Development
- Child Abuse
- What Is Required To Do Certain Jobs?
- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Male Responsibility
- Adolescent Behavior and Development In Present Day Society
- Special Populations Represented In The Mentee Pool and How This Impacts The Mentor/Mentee Relationship

Training time may vary amongst mentoring programs. Initially, mentors should be convened to discuss program expectations and their training needs. Special sessions and/or supplementary information such as videos and literature should be readily available to support the mentor's development and his capacity to assist his mentee.

Functions of a Mentor:

- Listen
- Counsel
- Educate
- Sponsor
- Role model
- Advocate

Mentee Preparedness

*M*anagers of mentoring programs extol the value of preparing mentees for the mentoring experience. There is wide agreement that mentees can be taught how to get the most out of mentoring. Mentee preparation should focus on three elements:

1) Willingness to consider change (self-improvement and changes in behavior) in their life.

2) Willingness to work on suggestions made by the mentor.

3) Willingness to open up to others.

*M*entees who accepted these three tenets of mentoring received more benefits from the mentor/mentee relationship than those who did not, program administrators reported.

*S*ome programs have used mentor/mentee contracts, which consist of what each expects of the other.

*I*n addition to the above, mentees should be given a full picture of the purpose of mentoring and the kinds of activities they may experience and outcomes expected from a successful mentoring relationship.

Student Selection

*A*s one looks at the levels of individual needs of students at risk, one must conclude that some students call for a higher level of intervention, utilizing multiple strategies than mentees whose needs are minimal. Consequently, one has to decide what level of at risk mentees will be appropriate for the program, given the constraints in terms of human and material resources and program design.

Mentor Selection

Mentor selection procedures have been a knotty issue for some mentor programs. A wide variety of mentor screening processes exists. For example, some are quite stringent, requiring background checks with State Child Abuse Central Registry. Some require extensive interviews, others simply go on recommendation. You must develop a method that will insure the safety of the mentee, facilitate the recruitment of good mentors and most importantly be amenable to the mentee and his family. We offer two suggestions. First, develop recruitment criteria which will enable you to get good mentors. The second is program monitoring.

Program Evaluation

The mentoring program must have an evaluation system for purposes of on-going feedback and to determine if program objectives are being met, or if program modification is necessary. This system must be in place before any program activity is initiated. The evaluation system may call for forms to assess various components of the program including recruitment of students, recruitment of mentors, training of students and mentors, individualized tutoring and group sessions. One may also wish to utilize consultants to be independent program monitors. Perhaps members of the program advisory board could perform this function. Ideally, internal and external evaluations should be conducted.

Secondly, the evaluation component of your program should contain a monitoring system which should keep program staff in sufficiently close contact with mentors, mentees and mentee families to enable you to be vigilant. It is advisable to convene an advisory team to develop a mentor selection process. The team should have mentee and parent representation.

Mentoring efforts should be closely monitored for problems mentors or mentees might be experiencing. Staff members should be available to mentors and mentees seeking advise and counsel regarding the program.

There is no doubt that the use of mentors to enhance positive life options for young people in need of support and guidance has been a very successful intervention strategy. The comments and suggestions included in this document have proved helpful for others in the Urban League network and we trust that they will be of value to you also.

Any questions or comments regarding this document should be addressed to the National Urban League, Youth Services, 500 East 62nd Street, New York, NY 10021, or call (212) 310-9076.

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Founded in 1910, the National Urban League is the premier social service and civil rights organization in America. The League is a non-profit, community-based agency headquartered in New York City, with 112 affiliates in 34 states and the District of Columbia. Its principal objective is to assist African Americans in the achievement of social and economic equality.